

MEDIA RELEASE

Level 5, 10 Hickson Road The Rocks
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Ladies in Black

Queensland Theatre, Australia



Photo: Ladies in Black - Naomi Price, Kate Cole, Lucy Maunder, Christen O'Leary.

Sydney Festival presents the highly acclaimed musical *Ladies in Black* for its premiere season in the city in which the story takes place.

From the adaptation of **Madeleine St John's** 1993 novel, *The Women in Black*, this acclaimed production has been brought to life by Australian screenwriter **Carolyn Burns** and internationally-acclaimed director **Simon Phillips** (*Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Love Never Dies*) with original music from legendary singer songwriter, **Tim Finn** OBE (Split Enz, Crowded House).

Ladies in Black, the stylish story of fashion, friendship and 1950s Australia had its world premiere at the Queensland Theatre Company in 2015. The frock-fest was a smash-hit, signalling the stunning and triumphant return of musical theatre. In 2016 *Ladies in Black* won the prestigious Helpmann Award for Best New Australian Work and was nominated for another five awards.

With a dash of delicate comedy, *Ladies in Black* is a magical modern-day fairy tale set in a stylish department store - F.G. Goode - in a city on the cusp of becoming cosmopolitan: Sydney is crossing the threshold between the stuffy repression of the 1950s and the glorious liberation of the 1960s. Donning a distinguished black dress, the bright-eyed, bookish school leaver Lisa is about to join the ranks on the sales floor of the city's most prestigious department store – temporarily, of course.

Her domineering dad intends to railroad her into a career as a secretary, but Lisa has grander schemes in mind. In that summer of innocence, a world of possibilities opens up as she befriends the unlucky Fay, the frustrated Patty, and the compelling European refugee, Magda, mysterious mistress of the model gowns, who takes Lisa under her wing. From the Christmas rush to the chaos of the sales, these women stand shoulder to padded shoulder and together learn lessons in life, love and longing.

The show features over 20 original songs written by **Tim Finn** and some 30 custom-designed and created dresses and suits from designer **Gabriela Tylesova**.

The cast includes an array of established and emerging stars of musical theatre. Newcomer **Sarah Morrison** plays *Lisa*, a starry-eyed school-leaver. Sarah studied opera at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music after high school, and then moved to Victoria to pursue her passion for musical theatre before being cast in this career-shaping role.

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The brilliant **Bobby Fox**, who wowed audiences playing Frankie Valli in the smash hit, *Jersey Boys*, plays *Rudi* (otherwise known as the 'Continental') along with a multi-talented and award-winning cast including **Carita Farrer Spencer** in the role of *Mrs Miles*, and **Kathryn McIntyre** who will play *Myra*. Accomplished Melbourne-based actor **Greg Stone** (*Once*, *The Weir*, *The Glitch*) takes on the dual roles of *Mr Miles* and *Stefan*, and **Kate Cole** will revive her performances of both *Miss Cartwright* and *Joy*.

New to the cast for the Australian tour is the leading lady of stage and screen **Natalie Gamsu** (*Strictly Ballroom*, *Mary Poppins*, *Dr Zhivago*, *Neighbours*) who will play *Magda*, as well as Sydney-based **Madeleine Jones** who was nominated for a Helpmann Award in 2015 for her work in *Once*. She will play *Patty*.

Taking the role of *Fay* is leading singer and stage performer, **Ellen Simpson**, who was most recently seen as Renee Geyer on television screens in the blockbuster tele series, *Molly*.

Akin to writing an entirely new album, the full musical score and lyrics for *Ladies in Black* is the creation of singer and songwriter, Tim Finn. Synonymous with legendary groups Split Enz and Crowded House, Tim was a major contributor to what is the Australian soundtrack of the 1980s and early 1990s. In 2009, he collaborated with playwright Matt Cameron on *Poor Boy* which premiered at MTC, and was also directed by Simon Phillips, and he is currently under commission by the Western Australian Opera, Victorian Opera and New Zealand Opera to write *Star Navigator*.

Tim has been one of the key drivers in bringing *Ladies in Black* from the page to the stage. He famously bought a copy of *The Women in Black* to read at the airport while waiting for a flight and was so inspired by the story that before he'd even boarded he called Simon Phillips to plant the seed for a stage production. He started writing the music on the plane.

Screenwriter Carolyn Burns wrote her first book, the comedy-thriller for children, *The Retrievers* in New Zealand, with her first play *Objection Overruled* performed throughout that country. Now based in Australia, she has since written four plays, including adapting both *Haxby's Circus* and *High Society* for the stage, and is in demand as a dramaturge and script editor.

Director Simon Phillips, former Artistic Director of MTC (2000 – 2011), brings this distinctively Australian musical to the stage. Simon has rich experience in musical theatre, having developed *Priscilla – Queen of the Desert* from a film script to a hit musical in Melbourne, Sydney, London, Toronto and Broadway. He successfully refashioned *Love Never Dies*, the sequel to *The Phantom of the Opera*, for The Really Useful Company, and is working on the musical version of *An Officer and a Gentleman* for a major international production. He adapted the *First Wives Club The Musical* for Chicago's Oriental Theatre in 2015 and recently directed the world premiere of *Dream Lover - The Bobby Darin Musical* starring David Campbell at the Sydney Lyric Theatre.

Director	Simon Phillips
Musical Director	David Young
Orchestrations	Guy Simpson
Designer	Gabriela Tylesova
Lighting Designer	David Walters
Cast	Natalie Gamsu, Bobby Fox, Kathryn McIntyre, Carita Farrer Spencer, Greg Stone, Kate Cole, Madeleine Jones, Ellen Simpson and Sarah Morrison.

Where Sydney Lyric Theatre

When 3-22 January

Duration 150 minutes, including interval

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Tickets Preview \$75
 Premium \$115-125
 A Reserve \$80-99
 B Reserve \$68-86
 + booking fee

Bookings Sydney Festival on 1300 856 876
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